Blackmail incorporated

FRANK "The Extortionist" Fasi is at it again. His current target is the Estate of James Campbell, which wants to rezone 1,781 agricultural acres so it can build a housing and commercial development at Kapolei. The mayor of Honolulu is agreeable — but only if the estate gives the city 2,500 acres of nearby land so he can build a sports complex.

Unless the "donation" is forthcoming, Fasi promises to oppose the rezoning request. Last week he testified against the project before the state Land Use Commission. Why he doesn't wait until it reaches the county level is a mystery to those unfamiliar with his penchant for grandstanding.

Another mystery is where Fasi gets the impression that he can sell or barter zoning. Government is the grantor of such decisions, but those determinations should be based on the need, quality and impact of projects on the community, not on what can be successfully traded or coerced from the private sector.

Companies like Campbell Estate want the city to study the merits of their plans. If there are negative impacts, they need to be rectified. That's called responsible development.

But legalized blackmail has unintended victims — the Hawaii resident still searching for an affordably priced home. Developers already stagger through a long, mazelike permitting process that adds millions of dollars to their projects. They are also required to put in much of the infrastructure like roads, sewers and lighting. And now land to build sports complexes?

Those costs are simply passed on to the home buyer and are reflected in higher prices. When Frank Fasi extorts money from developers, it's the house-hunting public that is taken to the cleaners.